



2006 Session Review

12th Legislative District



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Dear friends and neighbors,

It is a great honor to represent our 12th District communities in the Legislature. Your phone calls, letters and e-mails to my office are truly appreciated. Plus, it was a pleasure to host several visitors from our home district during the recent legislative session, including our young people who served as legislative pages.

We made significant progress during the 2006 legislative session on issues important to the folks back home.

After years of negotiations, an agreement was reached to provide additional water storage for our local farmers and communities along the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers.

Tax relief was provided for farmers and orchardists on fuel and replacement parts for used machinery.

Expanded short-line rail access was approved to allow more wheat to be transported to market using local trains.

The day-use fee in our state parks, including those in North Central Washington, was eliminated, giving our local families better access for recreational activities.

We also successfully fought to strengthen sex offender legislation to protect our young children and vulnerable adults.

Unfortunately, the Legislature also missed some important opportunities to protect taxpayers and families of veterans who died protecting our freedom.

This newsletter provides a brief look at the items accomplished within the 59-day session and those that continue to require our attention.

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to serve you. Although the legislative session has ended, I work for you throughout the year. Please contact my office any time I can help you with your ideas, concerns, questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mike Armstrong

Budget contains record spending

The purpose of a supplemental operating budget is to: address unanticipated, unmanageable changes in program caseloads; correct a serious technical error in the original appropriation; deal with an emergency; and/or address an opportunity that will not be available in the next biennium. Except for minor revisions, we did not need to change the entire biennial budget adopted last year. Yet that's what the majority party did when it discovered that the state would be taking in an additional \$1.6 billion.

Record spending

- The majority party created an unsustainable budget plan to spend \$1.3 billion of the surplus. The budget spends \$468 million on new programs, and transfers \$825 million to other spending accounts. It adds 816 new employees, unnecessarily spends money on baseball stadiums, allows taxpayer dollars to be spent on sex-change operations, and leaves an end balance of less than \$216 million. The 17.7 percent boost is the largest spending increase in the history of the state, and could lead to higher taxes in the future.

"Truth in Budgeting" proposed

- House Republicans offered a different proposal to make government live within its means. We proposed a constitutional **rainy-day fund** to protect taxpayers from future downturns in the economy. We also sought to **restore the voter-approved spending and tax limits** and place them in the state constitution so they would not be easily changed or suspended. Our proposals were rejected.

Pensions largely ignored

- On state pensions, the Legislature behaved irresponsibly. It resumed payments to the unfunded liability in Plan 1 of the Public Employees Retirement System and the Teachers Retirement System for the first time in four years, but voted to phase in the Fiscal Year 2007 payment over three years and not make up for payments suspended during the previous three years. The result will be much larger pension funding costs for all in future years.

Agriculture big winner in 2006 session

We made major progress for farmers this session. Most notable was a **Columbia River water agreement** that sets the stage for a 10-year, \$200 million bond package that will increase water storage in Eastern Washington. One possible venue for a new storage reservoir is Campbell Creek near Peshastin. The interruptible water rights that some people have on the Columbia River will be changed to non-interruptible water rights. That's huge. It means their water won't be cut off when they need it the most. Municipalities such as Bridgeport which need more water to expand will now have that opportunity. I remain cautiously optimistic because this bill largely hinges on promises made by the governor's office and the Department of Ecology. Yet it is a good balance between fish and farmers.

Also, under a bill signed into law, farmers won't have to pay the sales tax on **"red-dyed" diesel** or aviation fuel used for farm applications, saving them about \$1,500 a year. A separate bill provides a sales tax exemption on replacement parts for used farm machinery.

We responded to a court ruling with a solution that will continue to keep our 25 local wineries viable.

We changed the transportation budget to allow funds to be used for **purchase of the C-W Rail Line** between Coulee City and Spokane. This will expand access for farmers to transport wheat via rail. When we get all of our short lines operating together, it will relieve our roadways of 29,000 trucks.

Business and labor groups came together on permanent **unemployment insurance** reforms. The proposal gives seasonal workers full benefits while employers pay less taxes. It makes permanent the formula in which unemployment benefits are calculated on six months of employment instead of 12 months. Although it does not go as far as we wanted, this measure is a step in the right direction.

State park day fee eliminated

A five-dollar-a-day fee doesn't sound like much if you want to visit our state parks. However, it can be a lot of money for low-income citizens. Our state parks belong to all citizens. And we have many beautiful state parks in and around the 12th District. However, attendance has declined by more than 20 percent since the day-use fee was enacted three years ago. This year, the Legislature repealed that fee, giving families better access to our state parks.



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Sex offender laws strengthened

This year, we sought tougher laws against sex offenders. I personally pushed for the passage of "Jessica's Law Plus," a measure that would have created mandatory minimum sentences of 25 years to life



for first-degree child molestation or rape for all convicted offenders, regardless of whether or not they knew the child. We didn't get there, but we worked through most of the session to

successfully force Democrats to toughen the bills we considered. As a result, sex offenders who molest children and vulnerable adults will go to prison for 25 years and face tougher post-release registration requirements and supervision.

WASL options provided

Now that the passage of the 10th grade WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) is required for graduation, many are concerned as to if our students are adequately prepared. This year, the Legislature approved a bill opening the door for alternative assessments of student achievement. Students who fail the exam can also get a diploma by demonstrating sufficient work samples approved by a state board. Those who fail the test but have a grade-point average equal to peers who passed could also graduate. Also approved was additional WASL remediation funding to help students achieve high standards.



It was great having nursing school students and instructors from Wenatchee Valley College visit during the session to talk about the importance of legislative support for nursing programs.

Broken promise to veterans disappointing

I am very disappointed with a promise to our veterans broken by Senate Democrats on the last night of the legislative session.

Republicans wanted the Senate to vote on House Bill 3293, which would have required protesters at military funerals to remain at a distance of 500 feet or be charged with a misdemeanor under the state's disorderly conduct law. The measure was sparked by protests conducted by a hate group at the funerals of military veterans in Yakima, Kirkland and Renton. This bill passed the House unanimously. With Senate approval it could have gone straight to the governor to be signed into law.

In the final hours of the session, Senate Republicans obtained a signed agreement from Senate Democrat leaders. The agreement was that majority Democrats would pull up House Bill 3293

for a vote in exchange for allowing a pension bill the Democrats also wanted to be considered.

The pension bill was brought to a vote and passed.

When it came time for the funeral bill, Senate Democrats reneged on the agreement and moved directly to proceedings to adjourn the 2006 session.

When you make a promise, you should keep it. Especially if it is a promise involving thousands of Washington veterans who have sacrificed for their country. House and Senate majority leaders have now promised to make the bill one of the first they pass next session. I truly hope, for the sake of our veterans and their families, that the majority party will keep that promise.



Assistance for Wenatchee sport arena approved

A measure that will allow us to keep .033 percent of locally-generated sales and use taxes to fund a multi-purpose sport arena was approved by the Legislature this year. The revenue package will allow for a \$35 million, 6,000-seat facility to be built in Riverfront Park in Wenatchee. It will help us to host high school and regional tournaments and be used for European teams training for the 2010 Olympics. The bill provides for the creation of a public facilities district to collect and administer the funding and operate the center. The facility is expected to open by 2008.



Kole Galbraith



Sarah Quick



Erin Shimek

Page program offers education for young people

Many thanks to Kole Galbraith and Sarah Quick of Wenatchee, and Erin Shimek of East Wenatchee who served as legislative pages in my Olympia office for one week.

These young people had the unique opportunity to view the legislative process firsthand. They participated in ceremonial tasks such as presenting flags and also helped in operational chores like delivering messages and documents to legislators in their offices, committee meetings and the House chamber. Pages are between the ages of 14 and 17 and spend two hours each day in a classroom setting learning about the Legislature.

For more information about how to become involved in the page program, visit: <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/house/pageinternprogram> or call my office at (360) 786-7832.